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C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 006222

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [CO](#)

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH ARCHBISHOP OF CALI

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary. During a trip to Cali on June 23-24, the Archbishop told the Ambassador that the Mayor's office was struggling with corruption limiting its ability to act, and that the USG should find ways to help support the municipal police. He credited the increase in violence in Cali last year to infighting among different factions of the Norte del Valle Cartel. End summary.

12. (C) Archbishop Monsignor Juan Francisco Zarasti, a Cali native who returned to the city two years ago, said his office has been expanding to meet the needs of the growing community of displaced persons coming to Cali to escape the violence of narco trafficking and the poverty caused by poor government administration.

13. (C) While praising Governor Angelino Garzon's actions as generally clean, correct and successful, he lamented the many problems Cali Mayor Apolinar Salcedo Caicedo faced. Corruption in the Mayor's office -- which he defined as a problem of ambitious people with low rank wanting to amass power -- limited the effectiveness of the Mayor's office, and the support that it should enjoy from citizens of all economic strata. "Basic problems with things like trash collection are symptoms of a much greater problem," he said. While claiming not to be politically aligned, Zarasti said that the Church felt obliged to respond to political problems that hurt his diocese.

14. (C) When asked by the Ambassador which team of "angels" the USG should support to fight the "demons" of Cali, Zarasti first pointed to the police. Plagued by deep corruption and a chronic lack of funding -- whether the cuts originated in the Mayor's office or at the federal level in Bogota -- Zarasti said the current commander of the Cali Metropolitan Police (Colonel Jesus Antonio Gomez Mendez) is doing his best with limited resources, and could use any support the USG could give. Zarasti recommended ethics training in particular. He also saw hope in the efforts of the Carvajal Foundation and private groups helping the thousands of IDPs arriving in Cali.

15. (C) Zarasti believed that the Norte del Valle Cartel had a major influence on Cali. He said that just removing the heads of the cartel would not render it ineffective. He credited the increase in violence in Cali in 2004 to infighting among different factions in the Cartel.

16. (C) Zarasti said he doubted the FARC had much influence in the city of Cali, though he was sure there were FARC elements in the mountains south of the city. He also doubted that there was much paramilitary activity in Cali beyond commercial participation in the ubiquitous narcotics trade. He regretted that paramilitary activity was much broader and destabilizing in neighboring Buenaventura, where corruption was deeper and the coca trade more extensive.

WOOD